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MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Reconnaissance During the Advance of a Combined-Arms (Tank) Army from the Depth and Its Commitment to an Engagement 50X1-HUM

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Reconnaissance During the Advance of a Combined-Arms (Tank) Army from the Depth and Its Commitment to an Engagement

by

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As a result of operational training, staffs and troops have acquired experience in the organization and conduct of reconnaissance during an advance covering great distances and during the commitment of the troops to an engagement; our military press is also giving considerable prominence to an analysis of this problem. Unfortunately, however, the discussion of these questions most often pertains to the conditions that prevail when all army troops are in a state of constant readiness or of simultaneously completed mobilization.

However, in practice a more complex situation more often arises when the troops are in different stages of combat readiness to carry out their combat tasks. Thus, a combined-arms (tank) army of a border military district may have in a state of constant readiness one or two motorized rifle (tank) divisions, missile large units, air defense units, and also the first echelon of the field headquarters and certain support forces, including reconnaissance forces. Different periods of time may be required to bring to readiness the remaining large units and units, the organs of the rear services, and the second echelon of the army field headquarters.

When combat actions begin, the large units and units that are in a state of constant readiness, and the first echelon of the army field headquarters, will immediately begin to advance to the area of forthcoming operations, while the second echelons, including a portion of the reconnaissance forces and means, will only be starting to deploy and fully mobilize. Thus, the army forces under these circumstances will move forward by echelon at two to three day intervals. This means that the commander and staff of the army will find it considerably more difficult to command the troops and give them operational support.

During this period, reconnaissance measures may be carried out while the enemy is making massive use of nuclear weapons against the deployment and full mobilization areas of the large units and units, as well as against targets in the zone of forthcoming troop advances. Reconnaissance will immediately be confronted with additional tasks, since, as a result of the employment of the means of mass destruction, extensive zones of radioactive contamination will be formed, and main transportation centers,

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bridges, and other important transportation installations may be destroyed. A portion of the reconnaissance forces and means that were in a state of constant readiness obviously will suffer losses.

In a situation such as this, the first echelon of the field headquarters and the staffs of the large units and units in a state of constant readiness should immediately begin to carry out reconnaissance measures in support of the planned advance, primarily radiation, chemical, and engineer reconnaissance measures, and also take steps to restore the combat effectiveness of the reconnaissance units and subunits. At the same time, large units and units with reduced complement (second echelon) should form radiation, chemical, and engineer reconnaissance subunits and begin performing actual tasks in the area of complete mobilization.

It is not difficult to deduce that under these conditions the army and division staffs will have an extremely limited amount of time to plan reconnaissance. For this reason we believe it advisable that each formation (large unit) staff have a previously prepared reconnaissance plan outlining the entire range of reconnaissance measures to be carried out by the available forces and means and providing for a subsequent buildup of these forces and means. Of course, upon the receipt of specific tasks, it will be necessary to clarify or revise several parts of the plan (to redistribute the forces and means, to review the sequence of their advance and the types of activities in which they are to engage in the indicated areas or on the routes), but the principal measures will still retain their importance. During the DNEPR exercise, for example, the staff of one of the armies refined the reconnaissance tasks in support of the advance of the troops to the designated combat area, after it received a directive on regrouping from the district (front) staff.

It will also become necessary to refine the reconnaissance plan after changes in the situation during the troop advance. Based on the experience of exercises, it is advisable to make these refinements immediately if the changes in the situation are of a severe and critical nature. In the remaining cases, the plan is usually refined at the end of each day. Simultaneously, the intelligence department of the army draws up combat orders and conveys them to the large units and the reconnaissance units, and helps the subordinate commanders to prepare for the timely advance of the appropriate reconnaissance organs to carry out their combat tasks.

Since the amount of time available for organizing reconnaissance is extremely limited, the reconnaissance plan, as has been demonstrated by the experience of exercises, should be prepared in visual form on a map with

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brief explanatory notes attached.

This plan usually contains: the goal, principal tasks, and targets of reconnaissance during the period of the march, and, separately, of reconnaissance against the enemy during the approach to the area of combat actions and the commitment of the army to the engagement; an estimate of the forces and means to be assigned to carry out each task, indicating specific time periods; the routes of advance of the troops and of reconnaissance organs that are to be sent out during the march, indicating the time of their actions by lines and by targets; the time they are to pass the departure line and the phase lines; the daily halt areas for the army reconnaissance units; the sites where the technical means for reconnaissance are to be deployed; the composition of the reconnaissance reserves and their location in the march formation; a list of information on the enemy and the terrain which must be obtained from the higher staff, adjacent units, and forward operating troops; and the procedure for organizing communications with reconnaissance units (subunits) and other sources of reconnaissance data (information).

In the explanatory attachment those organizational measures are set forth that cannot be displayed on a map, as, for example: the organization of the rapid conversion of reconnaissance forces and means from peacetime status to combat status; the place and procedure for receiving reconnaissance units coming into the army from units which are in the process of being formed; certain problems relating to coordination and materiel and technical support; and the handling of information in the field headquarters, large units, and units.

When organizing the work of the intelligence department, the officers should first direct their main efforts toward carrying out those measures that would ensure the timely initiation of activities by reconnaissance forces and means in support of the advancing troops in a state of constant readiness, in order to reduce to a minimum the interval between the time the army receives the combat task and the time its reconnaissance organs begin their activities.

During the advance of the army first echelon, it is advisable that reconnaissance in support of the troops on the march be organized and conducted to a depth of a two- to three-day march of an army, and to a depth of a one-day march of a division.

The formation, large unit, and unit reconnaissance organs assigned to reconnoiter the zone of advance of the army troops must obtain and promptly

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transmit to the command data on: the condition of roads, bridges and crossings on the routes; the most favorable troop rest and concentration areas; and the devastated areas and zones of radioactive and chemical contamination, and the possibilities for bypassing them and laying cross-country roads.

The reconnaissance of the routes of march is conducted by reconnaissance groups from the motorized rifle (tank) divisions and regiments, and their composition includes combat engineers and chemical warfare reconnaissance troops. The distance of these groups from the security line of friendly troops will essentially depend upon their composition, their tasks, and the nature of the terrain. The distance may be as much as 50 to 80 kilometers in the case of reconnaissance groups sent out by divisions, and 30 to 50 kilometers for those sent out by regiments.

Under these conditions officer reconnaissance patrols may be widely employed. They may be sent out in tanks, armored personnel carriers (armored reconnaissance vehicles, infantry combat vehicles) and by helicopter to determine the exact position of friendly troops, to check out contradictory information on the situation, or to assess the situation in areas that have undergone nuclear strikes. Reconnaissance should also be conducted by the following: chemical reconnaissance patrols, chemical observation posts, engineer reconnaissance patrols, and special reconnaissance groups, sent out ahead of time on the routes of advance of the army large units (units) and to the areas where there are to be halts of several hours duration and one-day halts.

An air radiation reconnaissance group using helicopters from the army level and equipped with special dosimetric devices should be sent out for the purpose of quickly determining the overall radiation situation in the zone of the advance, in an area subjected to nuclear strikes, and in sectors of terrain that are difficult of access. It should be noted that if a complex radiation situation in the zone of the army advance and in the full mobilization areas of the large units and units of the army second echelon is to be assessed within a short period of time, it is of the utmost importance that we now develop and adopt special instruments to be dropped from aircraft (helicopters) on the routes of march and in areas where there are extensive zones of radioactive contamination, or to be placed ahead of time on the routes of forthcoming troop advances, to constitute part of the overall system for gathering and processing reconnaissance information. This will make it possible to quickly determine the nature of the contamination of the terrain without sending a large number of reconnaissance organs into these areas.

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When carrying out these tasks in support of the troop advance, the intelligence department of the army will concentrate its efforts primarily on obtaining the information required by the commander to ensure the successful commitment of the army, and particularly of its first echelon, to the engagement.

As is known, a border district combined-arms (tank) army that is located at a considerable distance from a possible area of combat actions will not conduct reconnaissance of the enemy with its own forces and means. Therefore, during the advance, the principal source of information on the enemy will be the front (district) staff and the forward operating formations. In view of this, the army staff, and particularly the chief of intelligence, must maintain reliable communications and coordination with the staffs of the forward operating troops; for this purpose the composition of the army operations group should include two or three intelligence officers headed by the deputy chief of intelligence. Their principal task will be to familiarize themselves in detail with the situation at the staff of the formation that is in direct contact with the enemy, and to keep the command continuously informed on the status and nature of enemy actions in the zone and on the flanks of the commitment of the army to the engagement. They will also organize coordination with the reconnaissance of the forward operating formation that is carrying out a portion of the tasks in support of the advancing army, and coordinate matters related to the deployment of their own forces and means and their commitment to action prior to the approach of the first echelon of troops. Before the first echelon of the army field headquarters reaches the area of forthcoming operations, control of the army reconnaissance units that are approaching the area of combat actions is usually turned over to these intelligence officers.

It must be pointed out that to regularly receive complete information from an operations group is a very complex matter. The difficulty in effecting the timely delivery of information on the enemy during an army advance lies in the fact that the sources obtaining it are located a great distance from the army staff; and during most of the time it is regrouping, the army staff is on the move. Consequently, in a number of instances it is extremely difficult to organize and maintain reliable liaison with the staffs of the forward operating troops through an operations group that has been sent out to them. In addition, at the present time the procedure charts and the methods of employing them still have not been perfected. The processing and transmission of necessary information requires a great amount of time and work. It therefore becomes necessary to use the communications channels of the General Staff, front (district), our

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civilian ministries, and of the member states of the Warsaw Pact; to deploy auxiliary army communications centers in the zone of the advance; and to exchange secure troop control of documents.

In the concluding stage of the regrouping, the principal role in carrying out the main reconnaissance tasks will be played by the forces and means of the advancing formation. It is therefore essential that at the very beginning of the march all measures be undertaken to ensure the rapid and organized advance of units of radio, radiotechnical, artillery, and special reconnaissance to the area of the commitment of the army to the engagement, where after selecting advantageous positions in advance, they must quickly deploy in battle formation and begin carrying out their reconnaissance tasks.

The experience of exercises suggests that they can move out ahead of the first echelon of the army troops, together with the road units of the engineer troops and the first echelon of units of air defense and the provost and traffic control service. When there is information that enemy sabotage-reconnaissance groups and airborne landing forces have been dropped in the path of the advance or that large gaps have been formed in the battle formations of the forward operating troops, it is advisable that the reconnaissance units move out immediately behind the forward detachments or the advance guards. Such a procedure for the advance and the coordination of the forces and means of reconnaissance ensures that damaged sections of roads, water obstacles, and zones of radioactive and chemical contamination are more quickly negotiated; and it also makes it possible to more successfully combat sabotage-reconnaissance groups and small subunits of enemy airborne landing forces during the march.

It is advisable that separate radio and radiotechnical reconnaissance battalions and the artillery reconnaissance regiment proceed along one or two army routes; and that the length of their daily marches, and the speed and order of march, be planned so that during the end of the march they move by company (by battery) in approach march formation along several routes and along the entire zone of the army. It is important that these units reach the designated areas and begin carrying out their assigned tasks one to two days prior to the commitment of the main forces of the army to the engagement.

It is advisable that a special purpose company move out together with OSNAZ reconnaissance units, or with the army forward command post. The decision as to the time of dispatching reconnaissance groups from the special purpose company, the procedure for sending them, and the number to

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be sent, will each time depend on the prevailing situation and the presence and nature of reconnaissance objectives (targets), and will conform to the requirement that up to one-third of the special purpose reconnaissance groups always remain in the reserves of the army chief of intelligence.

In our opinion, it is hardly advisable to drop special purpose reconnaissance groups of the advancing combined-arms (tank) army ahead of time (by two to three days) since doing so could reveal to the enemy the beginning, and the axis, of the commitment of the army to the engagement. Therefore, under the conditions being examined, it is desirable that at the order of the front staff a portion of the special purpose reconnaissance groups be detailed from the forward operating formation. The operations group of the advancing army should assume command over it and direct it to carry out reconnaissance tasks for its own support.

The most acceptable time for dropping the special purpose reconnaissance groups of the advancing army is the night before the commitment of the army to the engagement. However, it should be kept in mind that the special purpose groups will be able to obtain the initial reconnaissance information no sooner than five to six hours after being dropped in the rear of the enemy. This amount of time is necessary for assembling, camouflaging, reaching the area of their activities, and organizing and actually conducting reconnaissance. If the special purpose reconnaissance groups are to carry out their tasks thoroughly and in good time, they must be sent first of all to those areas where they will be able to most quickly detect the advance or concentration of enemy missile/nuclear weapons and his strike grouping and transmit reconnaissance information to the staff three to four hours prior to the commitment of the army to the engagement.

After carefully analyzing the volume of tasks confronting the special reconnaissance of the army and the capabilities of a special purpose company, we conclude that a maximum of four to five special purpose reconnaissance groups can be sent out from the special purpose company at one time, keeping up to one-third of its forces in reserve. As is obvious, its capabilities are not great, especially if one considers that the activities of special reconnaissance personnel in a number of instances will involve not only reconnaissance, but also the organization of sabotage, i.e., aggressively combatting the means of nuclear attack and control posts, severing communications, and destroying stores of nuclear weapons throughout the entire zone of forthcoming army actions to a depth of 100 to 500 kilometers. Since a group can be assigned to reconnoiter only one probable area where an objective might be located, it is obvious that

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if a combined-arms (tank) army is to reconnoiter several important objectives, the above number of groups, which is that now authorized for the organization of a special purpose company, is insufficient.

An urgent need has obviously developed to increase the capabilities of army special reconnaissance and to somewhat alter its organizational structure. This need has been further accentuated by the fact that in recent years a trend has been observed in a number of exercises toward including reconnaissance specialists in the special purpose reconnaissance groups and in the deep reconnaissance groups to carry out specific tasks (such as the reconnoitering of nuclear mine obstacles and the means of chemical attack). It is not always advisable to send independent engineer and chemical reconnaissance groups deep into the rear of the enemy.

In view of the foregoing, we believe that it is advisable that a combined-arms (tank) army have a special reconnaissance battalion, rather than a special reconnaissance company. It could be composed of two reconnaissance companies, each with three platoons (and four squads per platoon); a training company composed of three platoons (for training group commanders, reconnaissance personnel, and radio operators); an administration and service company; an engineer reconnaissance platoon; and a chemical reconnaissance platoon. This would increase the capabilities of army special purpose reconnaissance by a factor of two to three in comparison with its existing capabilities. It would be possible to form composite reconnaissance groups without drawing on other units for reconnaissance specialists from the branch arms and services. The presence of a training company in the battalion would make it possible to train on a continuing basis highly qualified reconnaissance personnel to reinforce special purpose reconnaissance groups during the course of combat actions.

The experience of troop, experimental, and command-staff exercises conducted in recent years demonstrates that aerial reconnaissance is the most effective means of obtaining essential reconnaissance information on the enemy and on the terrain. Under the complex conditions that exist at the beginning of a march, it is capable within a short period of time of determining the condition of the road network, bridges, and crossings, of ascertaining the radiation situation, and of detecting changes in the nature of the terrain resulting from the use of nuclear weapons by the enemy.

Aerial reconnaissance of the zone of advance of the army is usually carried out in conformity with the reconnaissance plan of the front (military district), and draws upon combat aviation during the period the

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latter is rebasing to the forward airfields in the designated area of operations. In a number of instances, a tactical aerial reconnaissance squadron may be placed under the operational command of the army for the purpose of conducting tactical aerial reconnaissance both during the advance and during the commitment to the engagement.

As the army troops draw closer to the area of combat actions, besides performing tasks related to the study of the terrain and the routes in the zone of the advance, aerial reconnaissance is assigned additional tasks relating to the acquisition of information on the position and nature of the actions of the enemy ground grouping and missile/nuclear means on the axis of the probable commitment of the army to the engagement. During this period it must determine the position of, and keep under observation, 80 to 100 enemy targets, approximately half of which will constantly be moving or changing position. The immediate task of reconnaissance aviation is to find and select from the large number of enemy targets those targets of special importance to be earmarked for immediate destruction by the nuclear means of the army.

The basic method of conducting aerial reconnaissance is to seek out enemy targets and make a visual determination of the nature of their activities and their coordinates. This information should be transmitted by radio from the reconnaissance aircraft to the command posts of the formations, large units, and units. Experimental aerial reconnaissance exercises in our district have shown that the receipt of reconnaissance information from an aircraft entails certain difficulties resulting from the fact that staff officers are poorly trained in the receipt, processing, and analysis of such information. Also, the low sensitivity of the R-313 radio receiver adversely affects the reception of signals.

The time interval between the detection of the target by the crews and the receipt of the reconnaissance information from onboard the aircraft by the staffs of the armies (divisions) amounted to tens of minutes.

Since we attach great importance to increasing the practical skills of staff officers in the receipt of aerial reconnaissance information from an aircraft, in our district we regularly (once or twice per month) conduct special training sessions lasting three to four hours with intelligence officers of the staffs of units, large units, and formations. This helps the officers to achieve accuracy in the reception of aerial reconnaissance information, speed in processing it, and promptness in reporting to the command. The positive results of the above measure were evident during the DNEPR exercise.

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This exercise also confirmed the need for an efficient system of organizing the collection, processing, and transmittal of aerial reconnaissance information to interested staffs. A post for the receipt and processing of aerial reconnaissance information was set up in the intelligence department of one of the armies. Its personnel consisted of two officers, three sergeants, and a soldier. The receiver center was located in a motor vehicle on which was mounted the radio equipment with rigidly fixed (by crystals) tuning to frequencies in various bands, and with the necessary communications means. This greatly helped to increase efficiency in collecting aerial reconnaissance information.

The circumstances under which the army will enter the engagement, and the need for effective employment of nuclear weapons against targets, make it necessary to periodically observe particularly important enemy targets during the preparation of a strike against them. Calculations show that in the tactical zone these observations should be made at a rate of every 30 minutes to every 1.5 hours, and no more than every two to three hours in the operational depth. It is very difficult to carry out this rate of observation, reconnaissance, and final reconnaissance using only attached reconnaissance aviation and supporting combat aviation. The experience of exercises indicates the advisability of a combined-arms (tank) army having its own organic tactical reconnaissance aviation and multi-purpose helicopters. At the same time, they also can be used to drop reconnaissance groups in the rear.

Reconnaissance of the air enemy during the advance of the army is carried out by the means of the Air Defense of the Country and by the air defense means of the socialist countries, and, in the area of combat actions, by the means of the front and of the forward operating troops. To obtain radar reconnaissance information, air defense posts are deployed at army command posts; and these air defense posts give warning to the troops of possible enemy air strikes. In addition, in the areas of a day's halt, and also when the army forces are negotiating large water obstacles, mountain passes, and places that are difficult of access, there should be deployed some extra radar reconnaissance means from the complement of the radiotechnical battalion of the army air defense.

In conclusion, we would like to say a few words about improving the control of reconnaissance organs. As is clear from the results of exercises, especially the DNEPR exercise, it is necessary to set up a control post for the chief of intelligence. Setting up such a post would make it possible to substantially increase the efficiency and continuity of control of the forces and means of all types of army reconnaissance, to

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sharply reduce the amount of time it takes reconnaissance organs and means to pass reconnaissance information, and also to ensure the timely dissemination of necessary data on the enemy as reports to the army command and as information to all interested echelons. The control post of the chief of intelligence should be an independent, organic entity consisting of an array of staff, receiver, transmitter, and specially-equipped vehicles with a cross-country capability. These vehicles must have multichannel communications, using secure communications equipment, with all organs and chiefs of intelligence of subordinate large units (units) that receive reconnaissance data from reconnaissance aircraft; the vehicles also must have selective circuit communications with the army command and the principal chiefs of the staff departments and of the branch arms and services of the field headquarters. The tactical equipment of a reconnaissance control post should provide the documentation, and visual display on an electron-optical screen, of all incoming reconnaissance information, the position of operating reconnaissance forces and means, and the availability and condition of reconnaissance reserves.

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